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SUBJECT: PRAGUE CONSULAR ROUNDUP, AUGUST-DECEMBER 2007

SUMMARY

1. Visa waiver continues to be a significant bilateral issue. The Czechs have begun to engage in HSPD-6 negotiations, while the NIV refusal rates and overstays continue to decline. Visa fraud is also low, making a fake bank document a significant catch. Post successfully implemented 10-fingerprint capture for visa applicants and increased its outreach to college students and Internet users. Post identified several cases of child support arrears and is increasing outreach efforts to absentee voters. End Summary.

CZECHS AND VISA WAIVER

2. Outgoing DHS DAS for Policy Nathan Sales and DHS International Enforcement Director Dan Sullivan visited Prague in September to preview with senior Czech officials the changes made by the visa waiver reform legislation. This issue continues to be of paramount importance for the Czechs. Despite Embassy efforts to address visa waiver as a discrete issue, the Czechs continually draw links between it and their support for our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan (where they will be setting up a Provincial Reconstruction Team), missile defense, and counterterrorism cooperation generally. The Czechs can also be expected to point to their December 21 joining of the Schengen zone (septel). They have a strong desire to be a visa waiver country by the time they take up the presidency of the European Union in January 2009, which we believe will be a strong motivation for them to move quickly on any required agreements.

CZECHS AND HSPD-6

3. Post hosted representatives of the Terrorist Screening Center and the Policy and Legal offices of the State Department on November 1 and 2 to discuss the Homeland Security Presidential Directive 6 (HSPD-6) terrorist watchlist initiative with representatives of the Czech Interior Ministry. An agreement on HSPD-6 cooperation would help the Czechs satisfy a required security enhancement of the visa waiver reform legislation. First Deputy Interior Minister Salivar declared that even without the carrot of visa waiver, cooperation with the Terrorist Screening Center is a worthy goal in and of itself. The Czechs are eager to move forward with this, but presently are awaiting the outcome of an initiative to reform their national security agencies. Post hopes to have more information about the progress of this initiative after the New Year.

CONSULAR SECTION GETS SECURITY TOUR OF AIRPORT

4. Czech Airlines hosted the consular officers and FSNs for a review of its document and security screening procedures from check-in through boarding. Consular staff members watched CSA screeners review passports and visas, and went on a tour of the baggage screening area, the secondary screening area at the gate for

U.S.-bound passengers, as well as the tarmac. The screening procedures were impressive and thorough throughout.

REFUSAL RATES AND OVERSTAYS

15. The official B-visa refusal rate for Czechs in FY-2007 is 6.7%, down from 9.2% in FY-2006 and well within the rate required by VWP reform. Post also completed a validation study of 1,000 B-1/B-2 visa applicants, which indicates that the confirmed visa overstay rate is also quite low. A detailed review of the validation study will be provided in septel.

FPU IDENTIFIES FRAUDULENT BANK DOCUMENTS

16. FPU identified a pattern of suspicious bank documents in October. While many applicants were simply refused visas, two applicants who appeared bona fide were found ineligible for misrepresentation, and eventually admitted that they purchased the documents from a vendor who advertised on the Internet. FPU obtained fraud detection points from several major Czech banks to help identify any future fraudulent documents.

POST DEVELOPS VIDEO TO ASSIST WITH 10-PRINT ROLLOUT

17. Post successfully implemented ten-fingerprint capture for all applicants on September 27. Consular staff prepared a multimedia presentation in Czech playing on a large TV in the NIV waiting room that helps applicants organize their documents and explains the fingerprint capture process in detail. The presentation has increased efficiency at the intake windows and helped reduce confusion during fingerprint capture. In November the section

PRAGUE 00001323 002 OF 002

trained local staff and changed scanners to support "FSN fingerprint capture" with FSO verification. This capture transition was successful, but Post has learned that the verification process for elderly applicants is often unsuccessful due to the poor quality of prints. For these cases, one workstation is set aside for FSO capture to minimize delays in workflow.

INCREASED EMBASSY WEB SITE VISIBILITY

18. Post continues to see applicants who have paid a Web site \$25 to provide Internet appointments. Post discovered that googling the word visa using the most popular Czech search engine brought up the private web site before the Embassy web site. Post's Webmaster modified the embassy web pages to increase their visibility on this search engine. In addition, The Public Affairs Office provided a press release to alert the public that appointment scheduling and visa application services are provided by the Department at no cost. Consular management also spoke to the owner of the Web site, who has made some changes to the wording of his site but continues to operate. Although travel agencies and other companies will continue to offer fee-based visa appointment services, Post believes that these Web changes will lead more applicants to the Embassy's official content.

OUTREACH FOR SUMMER WORK AND TRAVEL

19. Junior officers and locally employed staff visited a total of seven large universities in six cities during the months of October and November to discuss J-1 summer work and travel visas. The speeches also give junior officers and locally employed staff public diplomacy opportunities and a chance to see economic conditions in different parts of the country. The presentations emphasized the cultural and economic opportunities that the work and travel program provides. Attendance at the events varied from 5 to 60 people, and Post continues to develop "best practices" to reach the greatest number of students, such as piggybacking on previously arranged events or speaking to English classes. Post is collecting

testimonials and pictures from previous participants for publication on the Embassy Web site and to add content to the existing Czech language J-1 brochure for students.

PASSPORT APPLICATIONS INCREASE CHILD SUPPORT COLLECTIONS

¶10. ACS identified five cases of child support arrears in excess of \$2500 in October and November 2007 during applications for CRBAS, new passports, and passport extra pages. All applicants were informed that they were eligible for no-fee passports for direct return to the United States. Three cases were resolved when the ACS client made the outstanding payments, and Post can confirm that one case was for arrears in excess of \$6500. One case for a passport renewal was abandoned, and another remains in suspense pending the end of a 90-day suspense period for resolution or final revocation.

ABSENTEE VOTING AND REGISTRATION OF AMERICANS

¶11. Post is making a concerted effort in inform local Americans about the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act and how they can participate in the upcoming primaries and elections. Post arranged for the local English-language newspaper to publish some information and congen has spoken to a couple of local American groups. In an effort to give us the ability to reach even more Americans we are making a concerted effort to increase our registrations and expand our e-mail distribution list.

THOMPSON-JONES